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Honolulu, HI 96822
June 25, 2017

Members of the City Council
City & Country of Honolulu
Honolulu Hale
530 S. King Street
Honolulu, HI 96813-3077

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RE: Written testimony opposing Council Bill No. 52 (2017)

Dear City Council Members:

I am writing in opposition to the proposed change for the tax exemptions regarding historic homes in Hawai'i. It is disheartening to see Council once again having to devote discussion to this issue after the community made many compelling arguments in favor of historic preservation just a short time ago (2015) and then, again, just a few years prior to that (2010), the outcomes of both being in support of preservation. The same concerns for our local history remain today; in fact, they have *intensified* given the ongoing trend to destroy this heritage for those properties that are not protected.

My husband and I are the owners of a historic home in Mānoa. We went through the involved and thorough process of review in order to have it entered on the historic home list in 2002. I think there is often a perception that historic homes are for the rich—that these homes do not need to be supported by the government because the private sector can and will ensure their maintenance and survival. Our home is far from the mansion imagined by this portrayal. Owned by two senior citizens, it is a modest bungalow on an equally modest 4200 square foot lot. The tax exemption we currently receive is crucial to maintaining it. Moreover, we have seen time and again that, without government support and protection, the private sector will consistently maximize individual interests over ensuring the survival of history and historic buildings as a community concern.

A historic home is a labor of love. It costs considerably more to maintain than new construction, in both money and time—especially if one wants to preserve the integrity of the home. For example, getting new siding a few years ago for the lower quarter of only one side of our home required having wood specially milled on the west coast. I was in disbelief when I saw the \$10,000 bill for the small stack of lumber deposited on our front lawn. Similarly, our very complex roof line with its sloping arch and multiple gables, one of the wonderful features of some of these historic beauties, pumped up the price of a new roof to astronomical levels, made even worse by the fact that it had its own very long history of accumulated layers of roofing that needed to be removed before installation of the new roof. Everything in this house is now 87 years old and requires special treatment—from the plumbing to the electricity to the multi-paned windows to the original floors and so much more. Unlike many of our friends, we

cannot just run to Home Depot for many of our needs; it simply is not like maintaining homes of more recent construction. *This proposed tax represents a 333% increase.* I can assure you that the cost of materials for historic structures has not decreased by 333%!

Historic preservation, however, touches so much more than just maintenance costs. We devote this energy and whatever funds we can pull together because we believe that the history of our island should be preserved. Residential properties, much more than any government building, preserve the history of lived neighborhoods. I want my children and their children to be able to understand different ideas of beauty and ways of living through their own eyes, not just reading about them in a book; I want them to contemplate a history that is bigger than themselves and to understand the approach of another era to the issues and challenges of design, environment, and neighborhood. Moreover, these residential properties become part of the personal histories of everyone who has driven repeatedly through these neighborhoods over the decades. When a house is not maintained or when it is destroyed, it is not just a building that is gone. Part of our community dies as well.

Providing incentives for people to protect their historic properties is vitally important to the effort of historic preservation. Without incentives, such as significant tax exemptions, we have precious little to keep the bulldozers at bay. Indeed, the most efficient and effective way of insuring the survival of this residential history is through the tax exemption program. We should be aiding the preservation of these properties to the maximum, not figuring out how we can cut back that support in an effort to raise taxes by such a paltry amount of the City & County's budget.

These homes are important for us as a community with its own unique history, and they are important as images of Hawai'i to the rest of the world. Many communities on the mainland celebrate their historic homes, featuring these in guidebooks and highlighting them in special events—and many of these neighborhoods are much newer (like post-WWII), considerably less architecturally diverse, and not nearly as rich as what we have in our very own backyard. I know the council can find other ways to make up the necessary budget funds, and I encourage all of you to maintain the tax exemption program as it currently is. Government must stand up and demonstrate its commitment to our history by providing incentives to bring the private sector on board; the private sector cannot accomplish this on its own. Therefore, we look to our government officials to do their duty to *mālama* the community. We need your leadership to provide support and protection for these structures and our shared history. Please vote against Council Bill #52.

Sincerely,

Jane Moulin